

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

USDEL JEC PARIS

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FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION AMSTERDAM INFO THE HAGUE
ROTTERDAM FROM SECSTATE 28 APRIL REPEATED

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TAGS: PINS, NL, VS

SUBJECT: " POLITICAL PRISONERS"

REF: AMSTERDAM 274

1. IN RESPONDING TO CHARGES MENTIONED REFTL, YOU MAY WISH TO DRAW ON FOLLOWING GENERAL POINTS: THE VERY TERM " POLITICAL PRISONERS" IS HIGHLY MISLEADING. IT IS OFTEN USED LOOSELY TO COVER, AMONG OTHERS, HARDENED POLITICAL CADRE, SABOTEURS AND TERRORISTS. MANY OF THESE PEOPLE WERE ENGAGED IN ATTEMPTS TO OVERTHROW THE GVN BY FORCE AND THUS ARE NOT " POLITICAL PRISONERS" IN A MEANINGFUL SENSE OF THE TERM. THESE " COMMUNIST OFFENDERS" AND COMMON CRIMINALS FORM THE VAST BULK OF THE PRISON POPULATION.

2. THE COMMUNISTS AND OTHERS CONTRIBUTING TO THE CURRENT ORGANIZED PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN ON THIS SUBJECT ARE FOND OF USING THE PHRASE "200,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS"; IN THE PAST, THEY HAVE VARIOUSLY RESORTED TO 100,000 OR

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300,000. ALL ARE EQUALLY REMOTE FROM REALITY. THE TOTAL CAPACITY OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRISON SYSTEM IS, IN OUR BEST JUDGMENT, 40-45,000. YOU MAY WISH TO CITE 12/1/72 NY TIMES ARTICLE BY CRAIG WHITNEY (SEE WIRELESS FILE) WHICH POINTS OUT THAT INDEPENDENT AUTHORITIES CONFIRMED GVN POLICE STATEMENT THAT TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS DETAINED IN SOUTH VIETNAMESE JAILS AT THAT TIME WAS ABOUT

35,000. PRESIDENT THIEU, DURING RECENT VISIT HERE, PUT PRISON TOTAL AT 38,000.

3. FRIVOLOUS USE OF FIGURE LIKE 200,000 SYMPTOMATIC OF WHOLE LEVEL OF CRITICISM ON SUBJECT, INCLUDING SYSTEMATIC AND SENSATIONALIZED PROPAGANDA ON MISTREATMENT. WE CONSIDER THESE UNSUBSTANTIATED CHARGES TO BE EITHER FALSE OR GROSSLY EXAGGERATED.

4. ARTICLE 8(C) OF JANUARY 27 AGREEMENT ON VIET- NAM SPECIFICALLY PROVIDES THAT THE QUESTION OF CAPTURED AND DETAINED SOUTH VIETNAMESE CIVILIAN PERSONNEL IS MATTER FOR TWO SOUTH VIETNAMESE PARTIES CONCERNED TO RESOLVE BETWEEN THEMSELVES. IN FACT, GVN AND PRG ARE CURRENTLY MEETING REGULARLY IN BOTH FRANCE AND SAIGON; THIS ISSUE, AMONG OTHERS, IS BEING DISCUSSED. INITIAL RESULT OF SAIGON DISCUSSIONS IS THAT FIRST PARTIAL RELEASE OF CIVILIAN PRISONERS HELD BY BOTH SIDES IS TO TAKE PLACE THE LAST DAYS OF APRIL. ACCORDINGLY, WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE AND COUNTER- PRODUCTIVE FOR OUTSIDE PARTIES TO INTERFERE IN WHAT IS OBVIOUSLY A COMPLEX, INTERNAL POLITICAL MATTER (FOR SAME REASON, IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE, REGARDING ANY QUERIES ON INDIVIDUAL VIETNAMESE THAT MIGHT BE MADE, FOR US TO INTERVENE IN MATTERS NOW RESERVED TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PARTIES TO DECIDE).

5. BOTH PARTIES HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES ON CIVILIAN DETAINEE QUESTION, NOT JUST GVN. FOR EXAMPLE, PRG CLAIMS THAT IT HOLDS ONLY 637 CIVILIANS FOR RETURN TO THE GVN UNDER ARTICLE 8(C). AFTER YEARS OF WAR AND THOUSANDS OF ABDUCTIONS YEARLY, PRG HAS MUCH MORE TO ACCOUNT FOR; 637 FIGURE IS PALPABLY ABSURD, AS WERE ITS PREVIOUS UNCLASSIFIED

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CLAIMS THAT IT HELD VARIOUSLY 200 OR 400 CIVILIANS.

6. ARTICLE 5 OF THE AGREEMENT CALLS FOR END TO U. S. ADVISORY EFFORT TO SOUTH VIETNAMESE POLICE FORCE WITHIN SAME TIME AS THAT SET FOR TROOP WITHDRAWAL, 60 DAYS. IN FACT, AID ADVISORY EFFORT TO POLICE ENDED WHEN AGREEMENT WENT INTO EFFECT. PRESENT SUPPORT IS LIMITED

TO COMMODITY ASSISTANCE ON A ONE- FOR- ONE REPLACEMENT
BASIS AND SUPPORT FOR POLICE TRAINING OUTSIDE VIET- NAM.
PREVIOUS ASSISTANCE BY AID TO THE GVN DIRECTORATE OF
CORRECTIONS WAS DIRECTED AT DEVELOPING A HUMANE CORRECTION
SYSTEM PROVIDING ACCEPTABLE STANDARDS OF LIVING, FOOD,
SANITATION, HEALTH, WELFARE, ETC. OBJECTIVES OF THIS
PROGRAM WERE ACHIEVED AND ASSISTANCE COMPLETED IN
JANUARY 1973 ROGERS UNQTE
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